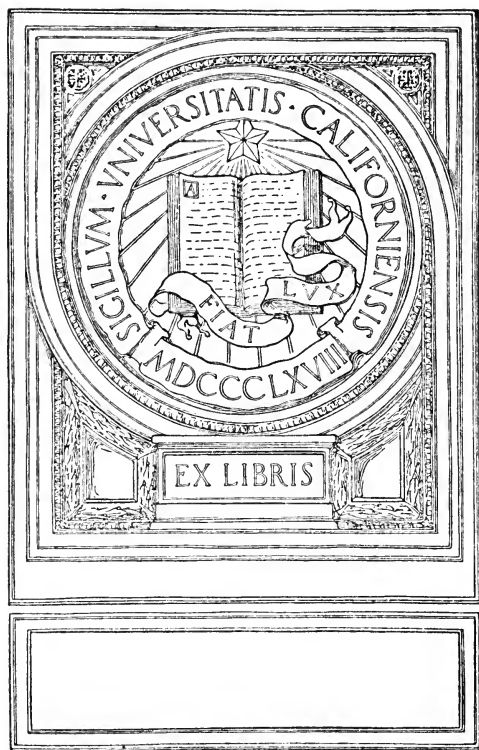


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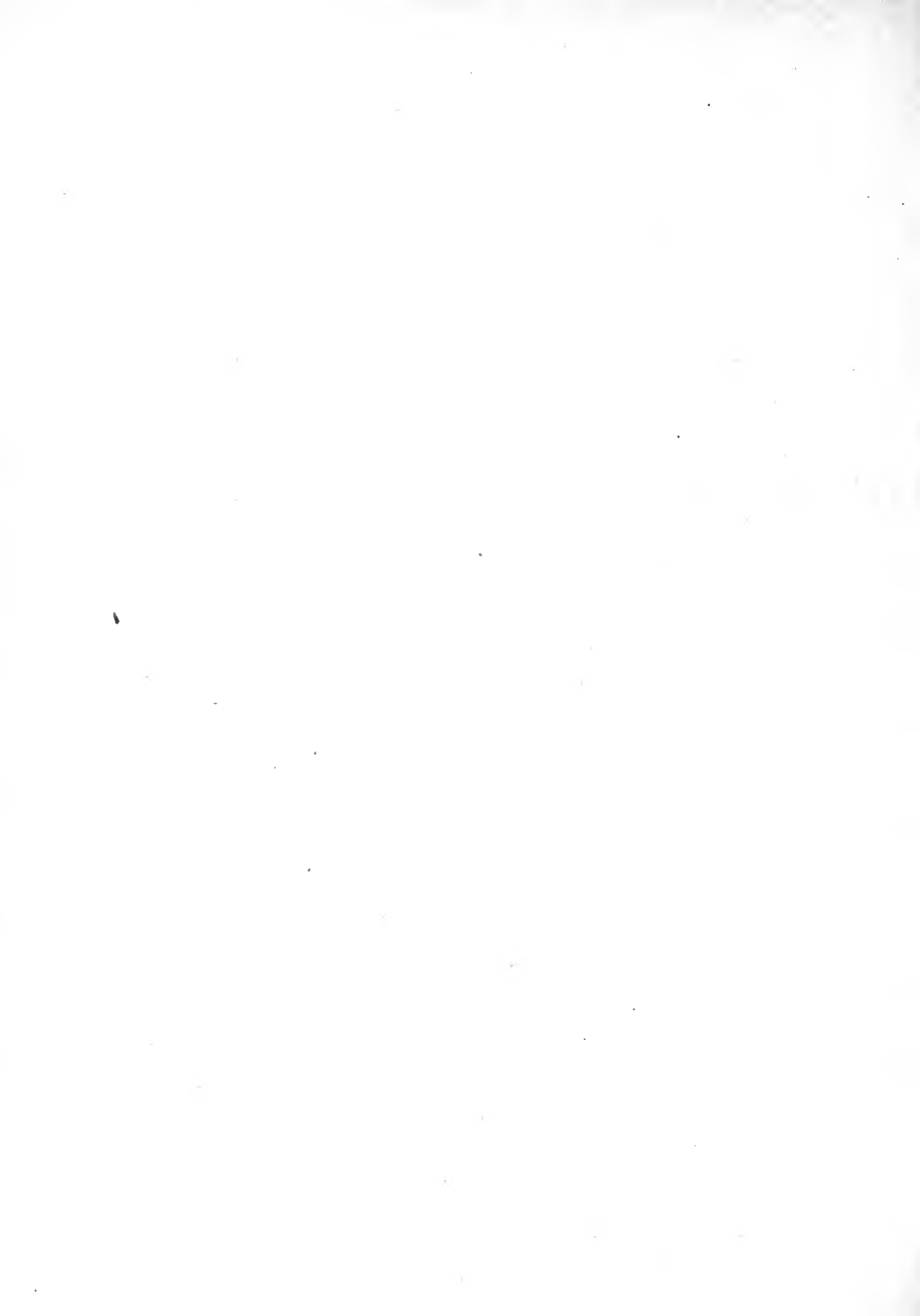
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INQUIRY  
INTO THE  
GENUINENESS OF A LETTER  
DATED FEBRUARY 3<sup>RD</sup>, 1613,  
AND  
SIGNED “MARY MAGDALINE DAVERS.”

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## INQUIRY INTO THE GENUINENESS OF A LETTER.

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It is thought that the publication of the following narrative may put literary and historical inquirers on their guard against possible deceptions, and encourage a spirit of investigation with respect to papers submitted for publication. It will also preserve some historical facts which have been brought to light in the course of this inquiry.

In the course of the year 1863 certain original papers were sent to the Council of the Camden Society for publication, together with a supposed modern transcript of a letter purporting to bear date at "London, Feb. 3d, 1613," which, by the most exact mode of dating, would be 1613-14, or, as it is frequently stated, according to modern usage in reference to the commencement of the year, 1614. These papers came out of the most unexceptionable custody. Those of them which were original were all perfectly unimpeachable documents, and they, and also the supposed copy, had been for many years in the possession of the head of the family, by whose present representative they were offered to the Camden Society. Every ordinary avenue to suspicion was therefore closed.

The supposed transcript was written upon paper which bore the date of 1795 in the watermark, and the handwriting agreed with about that date. It was remarked as somewhat unusual that the date was found written at the top of the transcript, but it was conjectured that the transcriber might have thought himself justified in

making the letter accord with modern usage, by transferring the date from the end to the beginning.

The interest of the presumed copy was found to consist principally in its comments upon the gaieties which enlivened the English Court during the Christmas of 1613-14.

At Whitehall, during the reign of King James, that festive season was ordinarily distinguished by the performance of masques, by tilting matches, balls, and pageants, and by costly suppers—the invitations for which last were issued for about six o'clock. (Finetti Philoxenes, p. 19.) On these sportive occasions court stateliness allowed itself to unbend. The Lord of Misrule was the sovereign of the hour, and the revelry often tested the modesty, as well as the good taste, of the beholders.

The Christmas to which this letter referred was distinguished by circumstances which added greatly to the customary gossip and excitement. The divorce of the Countess of Essex—that great scandal of the Court and reign—had run the first stage of its offensive course. A nullity had been decreed, and on Sunday the 26th December, 1613, the anniversary of the beautiful Countess's former wedding in that same place eight years before, she was again married, by the resumed name of Lady Frances Howard, to the King's favourite, created Earl of Somerset that his bride might not lose rank by her second nuptials. On the evening of the day of the marriage the Court was entertained by a masque written by Campion, (see it printed in Nichols's *Progresses of James I.* ii. 707,) and on the following evening by the first part of Ben Jonson's *Challenge at Tilt*; the remainder, which concluded with a tilting-match, being reserved for the evening of New Year's day. In the mean time Jonson's *Irish Masque* had been played on the 29th December, and was to be repeated on the 10th January, 1613-14.

The rejoicings on this magnificent occasion were not confined within the circle of the Court. The citizens, urged by the King to do honour to his favourite, received the newly-married couple at a grand entertainment in Merchant-Taylors' Hall, whilst Sir Francis



Bacon, the Attorney-general, presented the newly-married pair with a fanciful Masque of Flowers, performed on Twelfth Night in Gray's Inn. Bacon's *fête* was attended by the King and Queen and the whole Court, and is said to have cost him somewhere about 2,000*l*. Other persons, no less anxious than Bacon to stand well in the estimation of the sovereign, rivalled one another in the costly character of their marriage offerings, and from Christmas to Twelfth Night, the wedding, the accompanying pageants, and the splendid gifts, were as much the town-talk as the lady's divorce had been the general subject of discussion during the preceding summer.

Such were the gaieties which occurred at Court during the Christmas to which the transcript alluded to related, and it was much desired that the writer had commented upon them at greater length! She spoke only of one masque. Judging from her brief description, it was thought to be probably the one written by Cam-pion, which was performed on the evening of the wedding day. In a few succeeding sentences she made known that even the enjoyment of these brilliant festivities was alloyed by jealousies which made themselves felt even through all the bridal finery.

The first question that was investigated related to the writer—who and what was "Mary Magdalen Davers?" The letter helped us but a little way towards an answer. That she was a person of station intimately acquainted with the feelings of the Queen and Court; that she was a mother; that she had a son, from whom she had not heard for four months; that there was also a person whose Christian name was "George," who had a pecuniary dependence upon her, and whose expenditure was influenced by an anticipated visit of the King to Newmarket—these were indications of the position and connections of the writer which were gleaned from the letter itself.

As answering to these requirements, it seemed that the writer was Lady Davers or Danvers—names used as if they were avowedly the same, and the use of both which probably arose from members of the family of Danvers or D'Anvers having been accustomed to write the

name "Dāvers," which was misread for "Davers" by persons ignorant of the power and meaning of the mark of contraction over the letter "a." Sir John Danvers, younger brother of Henry Danvers, the founder of the Oxford physic garden, and created Earl of Danby for his services in Ireland, was a conspicuous person in his generation, a member of the Long Parliament, and one of those who signed the death-warrant of Charles I. The writer of the present letter, who was conjectured to have been his wife, was a person scarcely less remarkable.

Lady Danvers was the youngest of the four daughters of Sir Richard Newport of Eaton, and afterwards of High Ercall, in the county of Salop, and of Margaret the only daughter and heir of Lord Chief Justice Bromley. This marriage brought into the family of the Newports the great wealth of the Lord Chief Justice, and conjoined with conspicuous loyalty to Charles I., led to the ennoblement of Lady Danvers's nephew as Lord Newport, and afterwards of his son as Earl of Bradford. Some portion of the family wealth was carried by the future Lady Danvers into the family of the Herberts, on her first marriage with Richard Herbert of Montgomery Castle, a descendant from the same stock as the Herberts the Earls of Pembroke. By this marriage Mrs. Herbert became the mother of seven sons and three daughters, "which she would often say was Job's number and Job's distribution," a conceit which suited the taste of the age, and found its way into the pulpit and into biography. We who look back on the family from the distance of two centuries can perceive that they had better claims to remembrance, and that, simply as their mother, Mrs. Herbert is entitled to our respect and gratitude. Her eldest son was Edward, who became Lord Herbert of Cheshire, equally distinguished as a diplomatist and as an author; the second and third, Richard and William, found employment in the gallant band which England sent forth for the defence of the United Provinces against Spain; both these met death in that honourable service; Charles, the fourth son, was a scholar and a Fellow of New College, Oxford; the fifth son was

Isaac Walton's "Mr. George Herbert," the pious and amiable man whose quaint writings have taken their station amongst English classics; the sixth son was Sir Henry, who held the post of Master of the Revels for fifty years, and under two sovereigns; Thomas, the seventh of this noble band of brothers, was a Captain in the Navy, and did good service even under the reign of our *Rex pacificus*. Of the ladies of this distinguished family Isaac Walton remarks, with somewhat of the story-book generality, "they were all married to persons of worth and plentiful fortunes, and lived to be examples of virtue, and to do good in their generations." The heralds, with more useful precision, inform us, in accordance with the autobiography of Lord Herbert of Cherbury, that Elizabeth was married to Sir Henry Jones of Albemarle, Margaret to John Vaughan of Leydaith, esquire, and Frances to Sir John Browne of Kirby in the county of Lincoln.<sup>a</sup>

The number of Mrs. Herbert's children had scarcely been completed when she became a widow, her son George being at the death of his father only about four years of age, and there being at least two younger children.<sup>b</sup> In the performance of the new duties which thus fell upon her Mrs. Herbert was most exemplary. Devoting herself to the education of her children, and with a view to the exercise of maternal care over her eldest son, she removed to Oxford with her younger children, and remained there until the future historian of Henry VIII., who was a gentleman commoner of Queen's College, had taken his bachelor's degree. In the society of Oxford Mrs. Herbert acquired a reputation for great and harmless wit, combined with what Isaac Walton calls a cheerful gravity, qualities which gained her many friends, and among them the poet Donne.

<sup>a</sup> These and other particulars which have been peculiarly valuable on the present occasion were kindly furnished by Thomas William King, esq., York Herald, from the record known by the name of "Benefactors," preserved in the College of Arms.

<sup>b</sup> Edward the eldest son was of the age of 14 years 7 months and 11 days at the death of his father, which took place on 15th October, 1596. (Inq. p. m. 39 Eliz. part i. No. 62.) Mr. Hopper communicated a reference to this Inquisition.

The amity, as it is termed by Walton, which existed between this worthy pair is a romantic incident in the lives of both of them. ~ It was exhibited on her side in a continual shower of generous gifts: on his, by the dedication to her of several of his choicest poems. Walton has printed several of Donne's letters to her, and has alluded to others, of which we have not been able to find any trace.

Her platonic regard for Donne was followed by a real affection for Sir John Danvers. After twelve years of widowhood her heart was captivated anew by the singular beauty of a smooth-faced young spendthrift, who, in point of years, might have been her son. Donne in her funeral sermon fancifully endeavours to smooth over the disparity of their years: "As the well-tuning of an instrument makes higher and lower strings of one sound, so the inequality of their years was thus reduced to an evenness, that she had a cheerfulness agreeable to his youth, and he had a sober steadiness conformable to her more advanced years. So that I would not consider her at so much more than forty, nor him at so much less than thirty at that time; but, as their persons were made one, and their fortunes made one, by marriage, so I would put their years into one number, and, finding a sixty between them, think them thirty apiece." (Works, vi. 272.) Whether they lived together after the customary fashion of May and December, or in such manner as to give encouragement to others to form similar alliances, does not clearly appear. Neither the wit nor the wealth which may have attracted Sir John survived the marriage for many years. In the latter part of her life Lady Danvers, lost even her cheerfulness. The transcript which occasioned this inquiry mentions sleepless nights, the result of some affection of her head. Nine years afterwards we find her son George writing to her in her sickness, and intreating her with many pious arguments still to maintain her cheerfulness in spite of the troubles of life, the misdoings of her children, the loss of wealth and health. (Walton's Lives, p. 298, ed. 1825.) Again in 1627, in her funeral sermon, allusion is made to "an overflowing of melancholy" in "the declination of her years"—a diseased melancholy which cast

"a cloud upon her natural cheerfulness and sociableness," and sometimes "induced dark and sad apprehensions." Of course it would not be right to attribute this visitation to her ill-assorted marriage. It may have arisen from causes purely physical and arising entirely within herself. To the last, if we are to put any faith in the exalted eulogy of her admirer Donne, she lived a most exemplary life, full of charity and good works. Her residence at Chelsea, built upon the site of the house occupied by Sir Thomas More,<sup>a</sup> and incorporating some portions of it, was a refuge for all who were in distress, especially during the visitation of the plague in 1625, at which time Donne partook of its shelter. On the 8th of June, 1627 (Faulkner's Chelsea, ii. 140), Lady Danvers found a resting-place in the ancient church of the parish of Chelsea, and on the 1st of July following Donne preached in the same church the funeral sermon to which we have before referred. (Works, vi. 244.)

We have given this brief outline of the life of George Herbert's mother, principally with a view to the solution of the question:—"Was she the writer of the transcribed letter?" A doubt still existed in consequence of the name appended to it "Mary Magdaline Davers." Lady Davers's, or rather Lady Danvers's, name was Magdalen only. We could not find trace of any other letter written by her, but she was universally termed by her contemporaries Magdalen only. She was so designated in the return or office found upon the inquisition *post mortem* of her husband Herbert;

<sup>a</sup> Sir John Danvers was skilled in architecture, and in the art of laying out a garden. His house at Chelsea was not a favourable evidence of the purity of his taste in building, but his garden there is said to have been approved and enjoyed by one who in trim gardens took an unaffected delight—Lord Bacon. On one of his visits to Sir John Danvers's "curious garden" at Chelsea we catch a glimpse of Lady Danvers. After walking for some time, overcome by fatigue or indisposition, Bacon fainted. "My Lady Danvers rubbed his face, temples, &c., and gave him cordial water. As soon as he came to himself said he, 'Madam, I am no good *footman*.'" (Aubrey's Lives, ii. 226.) We were reminded of this and many other allusions to Sir John Danvers by the Rev. Edward Wilton of West Lavington, whose acquaintance with everything relating to the Danvers family is as great as his kindness in communicating his information to others.

so also in the administration taken out to his effects; so also in the life of George Herbert by Walton; so also in the autobiography of her son Edward; so also in the register of her burial at Chelsea; and, not to run through a great many other examples, all to the same effect, the question, so far as respects her own usage, and the belief as to what her name was among her friends, seemed determined in some lines addressed to her by Donne, and entitled "Of St. Mary Magdalen." After remarking that some of the Fathers doubted whether the facts attributed to the Mary Magdalen of holy writ and tradition were applicable to one person, or to two, or even to three, the poet thus proceeds:—

Increase their number, lady, and their fame;  
To their devotion add your innocence;  
Take so much of th'example as of the name—  
The latter half."

Magdalen only—"the latter half," not Mary Magdalen—we may therefore conclude was Lady Danvers's name; but, on the other hand, how exactly did the statements in this transcript agree with the condition of George Herbert, then in his twentieth year, and resident at Cambridge, but wholly dependent on his mother. Whenever King James repaired to Newmarket or to Royston, we learn from Walton that he was invited to Cambridge, where the royal visit was an occasion of expense to every one in the University. An angel (ten shillings) extra on such an occasion was an expenditure commensurate with the moderation and frugality of George Herbert.

That Lady Danvers was ever actually in attendance upon the Queen we failed to discover; but we found her, with other distinguished ladies performing, about 1607, in a masque-like entertainment written by Marston, and presented at the reception of the celebrated Alice Countess of Derby by her son and daughter the Earl and Countess of Huntingdon at Castle Ashby. She was then termed "Mrs. Davers," her husband not being knighted until the 3rd March, 1608-9. (Nichols's Prog. James I. vol. ii. p. 152.)

The "Mary Magdalen" excited some little suspicion; but, on the



whole, not dreaming of any intended mystification, and thinking it possible that there might be some understanding between Lady Danvers and the aunt whom she was addressing, which might have given rise to the signature of Mary Magdalen, we were inclined to think that the transcript was a copy of a real letter, and that the writer was Magdalen, the wife of Sir John Danvers.

The following is a copy of the letter in question:—

London, Feb. 3d, 1613.

DEAR AUNTE,

Instead of carrols, we may sing joy that Xtmas is gon; you for long meals, I for long nights. My poor head as usual still keeps tormenting me from getting much sleep. But this is no news to you, therefore must find you some other.

Their hath been at Court a mask; when it is printed I shall send it you.

It was indeed very rich & splendid. Their was presant all our nobility; the Embassadors of Spain and France, Count d'Gondomar & le Baron d' Tour. Their was Sir Noel Caron from the States. At first their became great bickerings on him, whome they woud not allow any place at all. The Spaniard did spake hard words, & loud indeed, saying, in great wrath, the Hollanders were no other than a company of merchants, and their seemd so much bustle, that the Lord Dunbar prayd the Lord Chamberlain to go to the King and humbly request of his Majesty's interference. So that, through the Kings goodness, the affray was all smotherd & settled before the mask began.

My Lady of Somerset was there, walked in attended by too ladies with long cushions, & placed her self in much state. She had with her the child my Lord of Walden<sup>a</sup> had by Mrs. Clare, of whom the family seemeth mighty fond. It is a fine child, & calls "Lord Grandfather," and "Lady Grandmother." Her Ladyship's dress was only tammel,<sup>b</sup> but she was extreamly rich in jewells. My Lady Hunsdon<sup>c</sup> (whome

<sup>a</sup> Theophilus Howard, Lord Walden, afterwards Earl of Suffolk, brother of the Countess of Somerset.

<sup>b</sup> "Stammell" was a coarse kind of red cloth ordinarily used for petticoats.

<sup>c</sup> Elizabeth Lady Hunsdon was a sister of Alice Countess of Derby, and both of them daughters of Sir John Spencer of Althorpe.

you know hateth her) told me one jewell on her head cost too thousand pounds. It seemeth the Queen was much displeasd at her sitting in such state, of wich we were shure she was informd of, for the next night she was full too pegs lower.

On Saturday the King goeth to Newmarket, of which I am sensible, for it hath cost me an angel exterordinary to George on the oclusion.

To my neviews and nieces I send my kind love as theier places deserve and differ. This is all at present

from, deare aunt, your loving and affectionet niece,

MARY MAGDALINE DAVERS.

*Postscript.*—Sir Tho<sup>s</sup> Rowe took shipping yesterday for Persia: for thees fore months I have not heard from my son.

Your letters are sent towards Venice.

Having pretty well settled, as we supposed, the question of authorship, we now proceeded to consider the facts stated in the letter, not in a spirit of doubt, but rather with a view to annotation. As we read the letter through again, some particular words and phrases grated upon ears somewhat familiar with the language of the assumed period,<sup>a</sup> but we know how difficult it is to draw conclusions from peculiarities of style and expression, so we kept down our feelings upon these points, and proceeded to consider what we may term the historical points of the letter—its assertions respecting public events and prominent persons. Of these there are at any event six.

I. There had been a masque at Court.

II. A dispute had been raised by the ambassadors of France and Spain respecting the admission to Court of the ambassador from Holland.

III. The conduct of the Countess of Somerset at the masque had displeased the Queen.

IV. A child which Lord Walden had had by Mrs. Clare was brought to the masque by the Countess.

<sup>a</sup> For example, "their became great bickerings on him;" "there seemed so much bustle;" "I send my kind love;" "this is all at present." Some of the orthography too was deemed very startling, but that was attributed to the copyist.

V. The King intended to remove to Newmarket on the following Saturday.

VI. Sir Thomas Roe had departed on his Eastern mission the day before.

In considering these facts, we did not take them in the order abovementioned, which is that in which they stand in the letter, but rather in the desultory manner in which the means for investigating them happened to present themselves to our notice.

The first point we had already touched upon. At the Christmas of 1613-14, there had been not merely one masque at Court, but several. The discrepancy seemed odd, but Lady Davers might not have seen more than one, or she might not have deemed Ben Jonson's compositions to be masques in the ordinary sense of the word.

We passed on to the interference of Lord Dunbar in the quarrel of the ambassadors. Referring to the customary authorities, we found it asserted that Sir George Hume, one of King James's Scottish favourites, "a man of few words but of deep wit," as he is described by Spottiswood, was created Lord Hume of Berwick in 1604, and Earl of Dunbar in 1605, and that he died on the 29th January, 1610-11; that his barony thereupon became extinct, and that his earldom was not claimed for many years afterwards (Douglas's *Peerage*, edit. 1768, p. 202; ed. Wood, i. 454). We found also that Sir Henry Constable was not created Viscount Dunbar until the 14th November, 1620 (*ibid.* p. 204 and p. 457). Between 1611 and 1620 there was therefore no Lord Dunbar. The question immediately occurred, how could the writer of this letter have fallen into such a mistake? We were told of the uncertainty of all dates, of the possibility of some one having claimed the title, or having passed as Lord Dunbar in general society or even at court, although the fact had not been commemorated in peerages; and, finally, that Nisbet in his *Heraldry*, i. 279, had asserted that George Hume, Earl of Dunbar, died, not in 1610-11, but in 1618. This drove us further afield. Mrs. Green's *Calendar of the Domestic Papers of James I.* makes mention of many papers relating to this subject, and turning

to the originals we found that 1611, and not 1618, nor any other year, was beyond all question the date of the Earl's death.<sup>a</sup> Mr. King, the York Herald, also sent us an extract from a copy of the inscription on what Nisbet calls the magnificent tomb erected to the Earl's memory in the church of Dunbar, in which it was dis-

<sup>a</sup> The papers which prove the death of the Earl are contained in vol. lxi. of the State Papers of James I., and are numbered 41, 49, 55, 57, 58, 60, 70, 71, 73, 74, 76, 80, 84, and 107. Among them No. 60 is a letter from John Erskine, Earl of Mar, who succeeded the Earl of Dunbar as Treasurer of Scotland, to Robert Cecil the Earl of Salisbury, dated from Edinburgh the 7th February, 1611. He writes thus:—"As the pen was in my hand to write unto you, at the very instant, I received your letter full of bad news, but it is true, as in your letter you did suspect, that some two days before I had heard of the death of our good friend my Lord of Dunbar. My Lord, what can I say, but I fear it shall be your misfortune and mine, to live and see all our old and best friends die before us. Dunbar and Kinloss are gone, and I dare affirm, the like are not behind of their nation." No. 70 is from Alexander Seaton, Earl of Dunfermline and Lord Chancellor of Scotland, also to the Earl of Salisbury, and dated from Edinburgh the 8th February, 1611. "Before the receipt of your Lordship's letter of the 1st February I was advertised, both to my great grief and astonishment, of our most worthy and noble friend, the Earl of Dunbar, his unexpected decease. For we had not so much as heard before any signification of his sickness." No. 74 is from Francis Clifford, Earl of Cumberland, also to the Earl of Salisbury, dated from Londesborough the 9th of February, 1610, *i.e.* 1610-11. "I have lately received a letter from your Lordship and other of my honourable Lords of the Council, whereby I understand of the decease of that worthy Lord the Earl of Dunbar, for which I am more sorry than I can now express, having found him always an upright careful justicer, a most painful and faithful servant to his sacred Majesty, and my most constant and dear friend; who, when last I parted with him, gave me much assurance of his unfeigned love, and that in regard of my travels and charges, whereof he was an eye-witness, in that service, without allowance, he would do me a good turn to his Majesty. The passionate sorrow of my heart makes me thus to speak my mind of him, and almost to forget myself on that which I intended to write of." Finally, (No. 107). See Sir Thomas Lake, writing to the Earl of Salisbury on the 25th February, 1610 [-11] (according to the indorsement), informs him that the King had determined upon the Bishop of London (Abbot) as successor to Archbishop Bancroft, and that his Majesty would have Salisbury and some other lords to call Bishop Abbot before them and let him understand "of this his Grace's choice, and that besides that his Majesty had a good opinion of him for his own part, he had in so dear remembrance the service of my Lord of Dunbar, who did first recommend him to his Majesty, as that though he were not now living, that the world might say he guided his Majesty, yet, for the affection he bare to him living, he would perform his request, that the world might see that such as he did find good servants he did love them dead as well as living."

tinctly stated that he "departed this life xxix. day of January, 1611." This was derived from "The Theater of Mortality," a book published at Edinburgh in 1704, and the 1611 was not 1611-12 but really 1611, according to the Scottish reckoning, which agreed at that time, in the commencement of the year, with the mode now in use among ourselves.

Through this little chink there entered a flood of light. Surprised at the seeming discrepancy, we considered whether the transcriber might not have written Dunbar in mistake for Danby or for Denbigh; but, coming to no satisfactory conclusion, we determined to test some other passages in the letter, and, having at hand Mr. Sainsbury's Calendar of Colonial Papers, we turned to its pages to see when Sir Thomas Roe "took shipping for Persia," it being suggested that, in an age in which a secretary of state did not know whether Iceland were an island or not (Domestic, Charles I. vol. cccxix. art. 82), a lady writer might be excused for substituting "Persia" for the dominions of the Great Mogul. The actual day when Roe took shipping was somewhat difficult to be discovered.

The first suggestion of his mission was made by the Governor of the East India Company to the Board on the 7th September, 1614 (Sainsbury's Calendar, p. 318).<sup>a</sup> His instructions were dated the 29th December, 1614 (ibid. p. 361). On the 17th January, 1614-15, the ships being at Gravesend, and, the weather growing sharp, "whereby there are expected some easterly winds very shortly," a committee was appointed to go aboard the ships and expedite their despatch into the Downs (ibid. p. 371, and the Original Minute Book, vol. iii. p. 341). On the 26th January, 1614-15, the committee reported the result of their labours at Gravesend. It would seem that Sir Thomas Roe was then aboard. He applied to the committee to consent, upon the request of Lady Garrett, his aunt, that Henry Garrett, their kinsman, might be allowed to accompany

<sup>a</sup> The calendar, though very full and accurate, has been compared with the originals, from which some of our statements have been derived.

Sir Thomas. After two hours' discussion the committee yielded to his importunity, but stipulated for a list of all his men, which he immediately gave them, and agreed to "put off one of them" in order to make room for Henry Garrett. On the 31st January, 1614-15, the ship being still at Gravesend, a farewell letter from Sir Thomas Roe full of expressions of kindness and zeal for their service was read at the Board. After this the ship moved on to the Downs, but on what precise day does not appear; certainly she was there on the 9th February. On the 11th of February we have trace of the last letter of the Company to Sir Thomas Roe upon an unexpected incident which had occurred during his detention on shipboard (Sainsbury, p. 379). In the Addl. MSS. Brit. Mus. there is a copy of a letter of Sir Thomas Roe dated the 20th February, 1614-15. He writes still from the Downs, and complains of his long and unexpected detention. It was not until the 6th March, 1614-15, that the ship lost sight of England (Sainsbury, p. 412). Whether these facts are sufficient or not to show that Sir Thomas took shipping before the 2nd February may be the subject of a little doubt; certainly they must be conclusive that his "taking shipping" could not have been mentioned as a recent event in a letter written on the 3rd February, 1613-14.

This conclusion gave instant rise to the theory that the transcriber had mistaken the date of the original letter, which it was said must have been 1615 instead of 1613. The answer was that, if the transcript were to be thus made to fit with the departure of Sir Thomas Roe, the change must be, not from 1613 (which was 1613-14), to 1615 (which would be 1615-16), but to 1614, which would be 1614-15, a mistake—being that of inserting in a transcript a 4 for a 3—far less likely to be made than that of misreading a 3 for a 5.

The next subject of inquiry turned out in a way which gave some little support to the supposed transcript—it was the discovery of a Mrs. Clare, and that under circumstances which seemed to give a colour of probability to the position in which she was found in the

supposed letter. A statement of the circumstances will disclose facts of interest in connection with the Countess of Essex, afterwards Countess of Somerset, which have never been printed; it is therefore hoped that it may not be unacceptable.

In 1612 Mary Woods of Norwich, a person who professed skill in palmistry and other similar sciences, came to London in the way of her vocation, and lodged at the house of one Crispe, a barber in Clerkenwell. Having obtained such a valuable inmate, the barber soon afterwards removed with "cunning Mary" and her husband to the more fashionable neighbourhood of the Strand, and there the barber became a willing agent in procuring subjects or patients for his female lodger. One branch of her business consisted in furnishing ladies who desired to become mothers with charms and medicines which would assist them in attaining their end. In the next house to Somerset House dwelt a Mrs. Isabel Peel, wife of a tradesman named William Peel. Mrs. Peel, to her great grief, was childless. The barber, at his lodger's suggestion, whispered in her ear that the very skilful person who was an inmate in his house could provide her with means to help forward her desires. An interview was arranged, and by "fair speech and cosening skill," Mary Woods persuaded Mrs. Peel of her power, but demanded no less a sum than twenty-four pounds for its exercise. In cash the amount was beyond the patient's means, but she delivered to her adviser "two lawn and other wrotte [wrought] wares," and received in return a small portion of an infallible powder which the cunning woman sewed in a little piece of taffeta, and bade the aspirant after maternity wear it round her neck.<sup>a</sup>

The news that a woman of such marvellous skill had come to lodge in Westminster soon spread around. Anxious ladies in many of the neighbouring mansions sent for her, and she especially got a footing in Salisbury House. Mrs. Jane Sacheverell, who attended

<sup>a</sup> After the bubble burst, and cunning Mary absconded with her plunder, Mrs. Peel says that she "ripped the taffeta to see what powder it was, and found it but a little dust swept out of the flower [floor?]" S. P. Dom. James I. vol. lxxii, No. 133.

on Lady Cranborne, was one of her victims. The Countess of Essex also had several interviews with her in the same friendly mansion, and gave her a diamond ring worth fifty or sixty pounds, sent her by her husband the Earl out of France, with directions to pawn it in order to procure a portion of the infallible powder, "which was very costly." The Countess also bestowed upon Mrs. Woods "certain pieces of gold worth between thirty and forty pounds." When the affair was called in question, Mrs. Woods asserted that the Countess gave her these things to procure "a kind of poison that would lie in a man's body three or four days without swelling," and that this poison was to be given to the Earl of Essex. But Mrs. Woods was an infamous person, whose uncorroborated assertion was worth nothing, and she had previously mentioned to Mrs. Peel that her employment by the Countess had relation merely to the child-giving powder.

Mrs. Woods possessed other faculties besides those with reference to which she was consulted by Mrs. Peel and Mrs. Sacheverell. She could "help" ladies to husbands, and "cause and procure whom they desired to have, to love them." On this branch of her business she was consulted by Mrs. Cooke, Lady Walden's gentlewoman, who gave her twenty pounds and more, in twenty-shilling pieces of gold, and, finally also, by Mrs. Clare, who is described as lying in the Court at Whitehall on the south side there, and as being a waiting gentlewoman in attendance upon the young Lady Windsor. Mrs. Clare, like several others of the ladies named, had no ready money, but the fees paid by her were very handsome. They comprised a standing cup and cover of silver gilt worth fourteen pounds, a petticoat of velvet layed with three silver laces, that cost forty pounds, and two diamond rings, the one worth twenty pounds, and the other worth five pounds.<sup>a</sup>

The incident respecting Mrs. Clare had such a general resemblance to the fact mentioned in the letter, that it was easy to believe

<sup>a</sup> See S. P. Dom. James I. vol. lxxii. Nos. 49-55, and 133.



that they were recorded of the same person. She who had, perhaps some four or five years before, given birth to the child which in 1614 ran about appealing to Lord Grandfather and Lady Grandmother, might well give her cup and cover, and even her velvet petticoat adorned with silver lace, as the price of a love-powder which might procure her a husband.

But, in spite of this partial confirmation, the genuineness of the supposed transcript had been so much shaken by the strangeness of the results in the instances of Lord Dunbar and Sir Thomas Roe; that we felt bound to pursue our investigations farther. The next point which came under notice was that one relating to the conduct of the Countess of Somerset at the masque. In this respect the information in the letter was altogether new, but it appeared at once that the facts stated could only have occurred at one of two Christmasses. The Countess was married to the Earl of Somerset, as already mentioned, on the 26th December, 1613. The facts stated might have occurred in the course of that Christmas-time, that is at the end of 1613 or the beginning of 1614, or at the next Christmas-time, in 1614 or 1615, but they could not have occurred either earlier or later.

In September 1615 Sir Thomas Overbury was murdered; in the October and November of that year several of the Countess of Somerset's fellow-culprits were executed; and, before Christmas 1615, she and her husband were sent to the Tower. Her trial took place in the May following, and she never afterwards made her appearance at Court.

The possible date of the letter being thus limited to one of two months of February, we further considered how either of them would agree with the several points before mentioned. As to the first point, we have already shown that at the Christmas of 1613-14 there were several masques acted. At the same period in 1614-15 there was but one, Ben Jonson's "Mercury vindicated from the Alchemists." So far as this point goes the evidence is decidedly in favour of the latter date.

But what about the fifth point, that of the King's intended departure to Newmarket on the following Saturday? If the letter were written on 3rd February, 1614-15, that day occurred on a Friday, so that the words in the letter "On Saturday the King goeth to Newmarket" would be equivalent to "to-morrow the King goeth," &c. Now, in that year the King was in London as usual at Christmas time, and as usual left town shortly afterwards. Chamberlain, writing to Carleton on the 12th January, 1614-15, says: "the King removes this day towards Royston and Newmarket, where he means to tarry till Shrovetide [the 21st February], and not to come again at Candlemas, as he was wont to do." On the 19th of January the King was at Newmarket, and there knighted Sir Dudley Norton. (S. P. Domestic, James I. vol. lxxx. art. 10.) On the 30th January Sir John Savage was knighted, apparently at the same place. On the 1st February Secretary Winwood "went toward the King to Newmarket." (Ibid. No. 17.) On the 3rd February Sir Robert Anstruther was knighted, still at the same place. (Moseley's Catalogue of Knights, p. 54.) On the 9th Chamberlain writes: "Mr. Secretary came home yesternight from Newmarket in a day, which was a sore journey as the ways are, being at least 54 miles; but he had coaches laid for him in three places." (Dom. James I. vol. lxxx. No. 26.) On the same day De Quester, the foreign postmaster, wrote to Sir Isaac Wake: "The King's Majesty came to Royston [*i.e.* from Newmarket] . . . yesterday night; and, on Saturday next, being the 11th present, his Highness intendeth to be at Theobald's, and on Thursday the 16th February here at Whitehall." (Ibid. No. 25.) And so it very nearly turned out, for, on the 15th February the King knighted Sir Robert Dillon at Theobald's, and on the 17th De Quester wrote again to Wake: "His Majesty arrived here on Wednesday last [the 15th] at night from Theobald's, and remaineth yet at Whitehall to keep there his Shrovetide." (Ibid. No. 32.) Chamberlain confirms all this. Writing on the 23rd of February, he says: "The King came to town the 15th of this present, and goes away again this day or to-morrow towards Royston." (Dom. James I. vol. lxxx. No. 38.)

The King, therefore, was already absent at the time when the presumed original of this transcript, if it had been dated in February 1614-15, would have represented him as being about to leave London. Here, then, the date, given by a consideration of the first point, was contradicted by the fifth point.

We then tried the date 3rd February, 1613-14, by the same test of the King's intended movements, and it seemed in all probability to be about accurate. In that year the 3rd of February fell on a Thursday, and the Saturday following was the 5th. The King was at Royston from the 12th January to the end of the month. On the 1st of February he was at Whitehall, on the 2nd at Hampton Court, from the 3rd to the 5th at Somerset House and Whitehall. On the 6th he may be traced at Whitehall, and on the 7th in the morning he left town for Royston. There is no contradiction between an intention to leave town on the 5th and an actual leaving on the 7th. Therefore, if tried by the tests of the allusions to the Countess of Somerset and the King's movements, it might fairly be concluded that 1613-14 was the true date of the letter.

With feelings something akin to bewilderment, we now turned to the still further test presented in the second passage of Lady Davers's letter—that relating to the quarrel of the ambassadors respecting Sir Noel Caron. We opened at the same time Sir John Finet's volume of *Observations touching Foreign Ambassadors*. Nothing can be of higher authority than this little work in such a question as the one now before us. At the time of this dispute Finet was Deputy and principal acting Master of the Ceremonies at the Court of James I.; for the most part he delivered personally the invitations to ambassadors who were desired to attend the court ceremonials; in their disputes about place and precedence he was the person primarily consulted by them, the bearer of their messages, complaints, and claims. He gives an account of this very dispute. As a writer he is one of the prosiest imaginable. We would print his account of the matter, but it would fill several

pages, and is written in such a style that nobody would read it; but it may be found in the book of Observations to which we have alluded, printed in 1656 under the editorship of James Howell, page 19 to page 24.

It will be remembered that it appears from Lady Davers's letter, that there were present on the occasion in question, Count Gondomar as the ambassador of Spain, and the Baron de la Tour, the representative of France; that the objection taken against the admission of Caron was, that the Hollanders were no other than a company of merchants; that by the King's interference the affray was all smothered and settled before the masque began; and that this took place on some day before the 3rd February 1613-14.

It appears on the contrary, from the statement of Sir John Finet, that the affair took place on the 5th January, not in 1613-14, but in 1614-15; that the King did not settle the dispute, but was unable to do so; and that after a multitude of diplomatic messages and suggestions on both sides, the Spanish ambassador "having merrily requested the Lords before, that since his servants were not ambassadors, and would not strive for places, they might be allowed room to see the mask, he with one gentleman, his secretary, and a footman, I attending him to his coach, departed," whereupon the King took order that Sir Noel Caron "should likewise depart, to avoid all further [future?] question about either of their pretences." Again, it appears that the objection taken had no connexion with Dutch trade, but was that Sir Noel Caron was "the representant of his master's [the King of Spain's] vassals and rebels (so he called them);" and again that the ambassadors present on the occasion were not those of Spain and France, but of Spain and Venice, and that the great objector was the ambassador of Spain, his brother ambassador of Venice assisting with allegations which were "held to proceed," as Finet assures us, "rather from a spirit of disturbance (forward as he naturally was to make ill business,) than that what he said was simply truth." Finet's account of the matter is further confirmed as to its date, the nature of the dispute, the prominence

of the Spanish ambassador, and the result, in a letter of Chamberlain to Carleton. It is dated the 12th January 1614-15, not 1613-14, and after speaking of the mask on Twelfth-Night and its success, which was so great that the King had it represented again on the Sunday night after, the writer proceeds thus:—

"There fell out an accident before it [the masque] began, that had almost marred the play, for the Spanish ambassador being invited, when he understood that Sir Noel Caron was likewise to be there, he protested against it, saying he was not to be present where a servant of his master's vassals should be covered, or appear in quality of an ambassador. Against which exceptions there was much dispute twixt him and the lords then present, and many messages passed to and fro between them and the King, but in conclusion he would by no arguments nor precedents be persuaded, but said it was contrary to his instructions, and so retiring himself went back the same way he came, whereupon Sir Noel Caron was wished to retire likewise and absent himself." (Domestic, James I. vol. lxxx. No. 4, State Papers, Pub. Record Office.)

There remained one other test to be applied to Lady Davers's account of this ambassadorial dispute. She tells us who were the ambassadors of France and Spain at that time in England: so does Sir John Finet. We will deal first with the representative of France. Lady Davers states that he was the Baron de la Tour. Sir John Finet informs us, at p. 12, that on 23rd December 1613, the French ambassador was Mons. de Buisseaux, and again at p. 16, that the same gentleman continued in his office on the 1st February 1613-14. During the remainder of 1614, and in Jan. 1614-15, there are many evidences in the State Papers in the Public Record Office that de Buisseaux still remained resident French ambassador in London. He arrived at Paris on his recal about the 30th January 1614-15, (Letter of Sir Thomas Edmondes, French Corresp. State Papers, 30 Jan. 1614-15,) and no one else appears, either as ordinary or extraordinary ambassador from France until the appointment of Mons. Desmaretz, whose credentials are among the State Papers, dated at Paris <sup>26 June.</sup><sub>6th July,</sub> 1615. He arrived in England very shortly

afterwards, and had his first audience at Theobald's on 2nd July 1615 according to the English style. (Finet, p. 26.) Mons. de Buisseaux, and not any one of the name of De la Tour, was therefore the French ambassador at the time of the squabble respecting Sir Noel Caron, although not present at the time. Indeed in those days the rivalry between the ambassadors of France and Spain was so great and so troublesome, that they were never invited to Court together, and a great deal of Finet's book is taken up with a minute narrative of the arrangements by which he set off the great potentates one against the other, and stifled the jealousy which afflicted the mind of one of them if he heard that his brother ambassador had been placed in a position esteemed in the slightest degree superior to that which had been accorded to himself.

So much for the actual French ambassador; but what about the ambassador De la Tour? How came he to be named? Could there be any confusion connected with him which might account for a mistake? Two gentlemen of the name of De la Tour came to England as ambassadors from France within a few years of the time of the dispute respecting Sir Noel Caron. One of them was Henri de la Tour d'Auvergne, Duc de Bouillon, one of the most illustrious Frenchmen of his day. He was never in England as resident ambassador, but visited this country on extraordinary missions in 1591, 1596, and 1612, on which last occasion he arrived in April and returned in May. There are many evidences in the State Papers of the friendly interest which he subsequently continued to take in England and English affairs,\* but in the latter part of his life he was too busily occupied in the French civil troubles to visit England. The course of his life may be seen in the memoir of him in the *Biographie Universelle*. Under any conceivable date of this letter the Duke de Bouillon could not be the person alluded to.

The other De la Tour to whom we have referred as having been

\* Many letters from him occur in the French Correspondence, one of which, dated from Paris on the 14 January 1613-4, is addressed to the Earl of Somerset, by way of congratulation on his elevation to that title and his subsequent marriage.

in this country on an embassy from France at about this time is equally out of the question. He came on a special embassy in the year 1617. True this De la Tour was a Baron, and was therefore probably the person who was in the mind of the actual writer of this letter, but the date of his mission stultifies the attribution of any share in this incident to him. He landed at Deal on the 24th January 1616-17, after two days' exposure to a very tempestuous sea in crossing from Dieppe. (Dom. James I. vol xc. No. 39.) He returned home in the last week of the succeeding month of February. At that time the Countess of Somerset was still in the Tower, convicted of murder on her own confession. No supposition of mistake can make this letter consistent with a date which would suit with the visit of the second De la Tour.

Pass we now to the Spanish ambassador. The letter-writer says he was the Count de Gondomar. The letter-writer is right, and yet in being so is fatally wrong. Sir John Finet, in his account of "passages at the marriage of the Earl of Somerset," mentions this same ambassador as having then newly come into this kingdom;<sup>a</sup> and in the margin of his book, at p. 12, he gives his name "Don Diego Sarmiento de Acuna," and he mentions him again by the same name "Don Diego Sarmiento" at p. 25, under the date of the 23rd April, 1615; and again at p. 35, under the date of about the middle of the year 1616. Now there is no doubt that this was the same person who afterwards became Count de Gondomar, but the letter-writer's misfortune is this that Sarmiento was not created Count de Gondomar until the year 1617. Cottington, then English ambassador in Spain, who had previously been in the habit of mentioning the Spanish ambassador in London as Don Diego or Don Diego Sarmiento, wrote to Secretary Sir Thomas Lake, on the 26th April 1617, old style, from Madrid, as follows, "Before this can come to your hand I presume you will hear that Don Diego Sarmiento is now Conde de Gondomar, an honour which the King

<sup>a</sup> Camden notices his arrival under "1614, Oct. Didacus de Sarmento legatus pro Hispano." *Annals*, Jac. I. p. 11.

hath done him, and with much applause of all men here." The news reached London, as Cottington expected, before his letter, for on the 1st May 1617, Sir John Digby (the subsequent Earl of Bristol) writing to Buckingham, then an Earl, from London, says, "The Spanish ambassador is ill again, but I hope in little danger. The King of Spain hath been pleased to honour him with the title of an Earl, and he is now called Conde de Gondomar." (Spanish Correspondence, under the dates of 26th April and 1st May, 1617.)

All contemporary writers who mention the Spanish ambassador by name, speak of him in the same manner as Finet, by his title of Sarmiento, but it has been usual for more recent historians to refer to him, even from his first arrival in England, by the title which was afterwards conferred upon him.<sup>a</sup>

Summing up, then, the results which had been obtained, it seemed that by the first and second points—the masque at Court and the ambassadors' dispute—the date of the letter was shown to be February 1614-15, but that the fifth point, the King's intended departure, carried it back to 1613-14, whilst the allusion to Sir Thomas Roe in the sixth point again placed it in 1614-15; the mention of Lord Dunbar was inconsistent with any date subsequent to 1610-11, the notice of Gondomar could not have been written before 1617-18, and that of De la Tour, although no doubt prompted by a knowledge of his visit to England in 1616-17, was not applicable to any period whatever, inasmuch as he was never in England on any 5th January.

Such may be termed the results of the positive evidence brought forward in our inquiry. The negative evidence—or rather the arguments deducible from extraordinary omissions—whether the letter was dated in 1614 or 1615, is equally conclusive. Thus, for

<sup>a</sup> We ought to except Mr. Gardiner, who in his admirable History of England from 1603 to 1616, accurately describes the ambassador as "Don Diego Sarmiento de Acuna, better known to us by his later title of the Count of Gondomar." (vol. ii. 87.) Mr. Gardiner's complete acquaintance with the State Papers enabled him at once to give us a reference to the letter of Cottington, above quoted from the Spanish Correspondence.



example, it is allowed that the evidence as to the King's intended departure from London is in favour of the date prefixed to the letter, "Feb. 3rd, 1613-[14]." But if we consider what really took place during the months of January and February in that year, we shall see how imperfect, or rather how false, a representation of the actual facts is contained in Lady Davers's letter.

We have shewn that the King was in town at Christmas 1613 at Somerset's wedding, and also during the festivities, both at Court and in the city, which followed it. As soon as these were over, he was glad to escape to his horses and his dogs. On the 12th January he was at Royston, whence he visited Audley End (Dom. James I. vol. lxxvi. No. 6.), and continued away from London during the whole remainder of the month. In the meantime the Queen was at Somerset House, busy in preparation for a marriage by which she evidently intended to eclipse that of the Countess of Somerset, which her Majesty, much to her credit, had only with great difficulty been prevailed upon to countenance with her presence. The bride on this occasion was Mistress Jane Drummond, a daughter of Patrick third Lord Drummond, and one of the ladies of the Queen's household. The bridegroom was Sir Robert Ker of Cessford, lately created Lord Roxburgh. A special invitation was sent to the King to be present on this occasion. He accordingly came to town on the 1st February. The Queen and the Lords went out to meet him, as was the custom, in their gayest carriages, almost to Theobald's. On the 3rd February, the marriage took place. Daniel's "*Hymen's Triumph*, a pastoral Tragi-comedy," was produced for the first time, and, there not being a room in the Queen's residence large enough to hold the expected gathering, it was played in a square paved inclosure, covered over, and otherwise prepared for the reception of an audience which comprised all that was noble and beautiful in the English Court. On the day following the Lord Mayor and Aldermen were invited by her Majesty, "and had rich gloves. They went thither in pomp and were graciously used, and, besides their great cheer and many healths, had a play. They pre-

sented the bride with a fair cup and two hundred Jacobus pieces or double sovereigns in it." The King stayed through these festivities up to the Monday after the marriage, which was the 7th February. The Queen had yet to give a grand entertainment to all who had made presents to the bride, which she did in a most sumptuous and royal manner (Dom. James I. vol. lxxvi. No. 33). But nothing could detain the King. "He went away," says Chamberlain, "on Monday morning, and thought long till he was gone, for he went thorough that night to Royston, and so to Newmarket." (Dom. James I. vol. lxxvi. No. 20). Is it conceivable,—is it in the nature of womanhood—that Lady Davers, a person apparently acquainted with the Queen's feelings and doings, should have written a newsletter to a female relation on the very day of the marriage of Miss Drummond, and yet have not alluded to any of the gay doings by which it was distinguished? Nay more, in spite of the King's movements which have been detailed, that she should have written her letter in such way as distinctly to lead to the conclusion that the King had been in London all through the Christmas celebrations, which lasted from Christmas until Candlemas Day, the 2nd of February, and was preparing to escape as if for the first time on the Saturday following?

Another example of silence which is perfectly incredible would be furnished by this letter if it could be supposed to have been written on the 3rd February, 1614-15, which would make it coincide with the one masque at Court, the ambassadors' dispute, and the departure of Sir Thomas Roe. The January and February of 1614-15, was a remarkable period. It was the year of the Great Snow; the "*frigus intensum et nix copiosissima*," as it is termed by Camden. The following are two descriptions of what happened. Chamberlain wrote thus on the 16th February, 1614-15: "Yesterday I received your letter of the 29th of January. It is no marvel if the posts keep not their ordinary days and times, for we have had such weather that I think they had much ado to come at all. Ever since Sunday was three weeks [the 22nd of January] we have had

continual frost and snow, whereof we have had such plenty as I never knew the like. For there hath not past one day since that time but it hath snowed more or less, and on Sunday last it began at seven o'clock in the morning, and never ceased till Monday after nine at night, so that it lay very deep, and we fear we shall hear of much harm; but the greatest part of it went away on Tuesday and yesterday with a kindly thaw, but this night it is frozen again, and grown very cold." (Dom. James I. vol. lxxx. No. 30.) De Quester, who has a more precise recollection of weather than Chamberlain, describes these "great snows" as "more than had been since the great snow which was thirty-six years past." (Ibid. No. 32.) Others make mention of the disastrous floods and high tides which ensued, and Howes, the continuator of Stowe, sums up the whole matter thus: "The 17. of January, 1614, began a great frost with extreme snow, which lasted until the 14. of February; and, albeit the violence of the frost and snow some days abated, yet it continued freezing and snowing much or little until the 7. of March, whereby much cattle perished, as well old as young; and in some places divers devised snow-ploughs to clear the ground, and to fodder cattle. This snow was very dangerous to all travellers." (Stowe's Chronicle, ed. Howes, p. 1023.)

Of course Lady Davers, if she were the letter-writer, could at the date of her letter have had an acquaintance with merely the comparative commencement of this heavy winter. On the 3rd February they were only in the third week of the frost, and had only had ten days of snow. But surely that would have been enough to excite some little observation on the difficulty of travelling with reference to the King's intended journey. On the 1st of February Chamberlain writes: "Mr. Secretary went on Monday toward the King to Newmarket in as hard and cold weather as came this year; for it hath been very sharp these ten days with much frost and snow, which continues still, and so is like to do for ought I see. The Thames hath not been passable; but in a manner closed up, almost this sennight. The floods I wrote to you of the last week did a

great deal more harm than I could then tell you, for we have certaintie of more than twenty drowned that Saturday within forty miles compass of this town." (Dom. James I. vol. lxxx. No. 17.)

Can it be supposed that weather so extraordinarily severe would not have occasioned even a passing allusion in such a letter as that of Lady Davers?

To pursue the subject further seemed needless. The letter was too much damaged by the results of our inquiry to be published by the Camden Society. By whom written, or for what purpose, is a mystery, and will probably remain so. It was evidently put together by some one who had a knowledge of many things connected with the period in question, but whose knowledge was not deep enough or precise enough to enable him to concoct an antiquarian *jeu d'esprit* which should baffle investigation.

-J. B.







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